

Air Canada

Texas Air, and all those pirates down there, ended up having to give wage concessions. For the shares the employees bought, they lost anywhere from \$1 to \$4 an hour in pay. They were loyal employees, helped the company survive, invested money in it, took less pay, and what happened? Eastern Airlines is still on the verge of bankruptcy, Texas Air took over Peoples' Express, where the employees invested millions. Again, I caution the airline employees of Air Canada.

If one turns a good airline like Air Canada over to those so-called free market forces and private enterprise operators, I would not call that too safe an investment.

For my hon. friend to compare a private enterprise corporation with a co-operative tells one that he knows nothing about a co-operative. Having been a member of a co-operative and a credit union for the last 37 years, including serving on boards of directors, I think that I know a little about it. The membership has control and it decides whether there will be dividends. It is not a board of directors in a boardroom in Toronto or in Chicago that make the decisions; it is the members who decide. A co-operative is the most democratic form of enterprise in existence, and I remind my hon. friend of that.

What say did the taxpayers of Canada get as to whether or not there is a dividend on Air Canada's profits last year? We had no say, and the Government puts dummies on the board of directors who did not allow a dividend to be paid.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper) would like to ask the Hon. Member a question.

Mr. Keeper: I would like to ask my colleague a question. It has to do with Air Canada's workers in Winnipeg. My colleague has been a critic in the area of transport for many years, and he knows that a number of decades ago Winnipeg lost a good part of its aerospace industry to Montreal when Trans-Canada Air Lines was in existence. Now with Air Canada, what I hear from workers in Winnipeg is concern about whether this privatization will endanger the work that Air Canada does in Winnipeg, and therefore their jobs. They feel there is a threat to the aerospace industry in Winnipeg. Is my colleague informed on this matter, and can he comment on it?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Regina West has two minutes.

Mr. Benjamin: I appreciate the concern of my colleague. The employees should be concerned at all three maintenance bases in Toronto, Montreal, and most particularly in Winnipeg, because while Air Canada assures us there will be a maintenance and repair centre kept in Winnipeg, that centre is suitable for maintaining present generation aircraft, for example, DC-9s, 727s, DC-8s, and 747s. If Air Canada decides to buy an aircraft of a completely new generation from a different manufacturer of aircraft than what it presently owns, then the people in Winnipeg should be worried. Unless

and until we receive a guarantee that no matter which aircraft Air Canada purchases, a guarantee that a proper apportionment of repair, maintenance, and overhaul will be carried on in Winnipeg, then I would suggest that the people in Winnipeg continue to worry and continue to fight.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland—Kent): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to this important piece of legislation that will lead to the privatization of Air Canada. We have to ask ourselves how we reached the point where this Government wants to get rid of a Crown corporation, a corporation that has played a major role in the development of this country, from east to west and from north to south. We can be proud of Air Canada. Air Canada is a corporation that has played a major role in bringing communities closer together from coast to coast. Thanks to Air Canada, we can travel quite easily from place to place, because Air Canada has a network that connects a considerable number of communities. Air Canada provides these communities with a competitive service and ensures them a place in the regional development of this country, because when we talk about regional development, we automatically talk about transportation, and of course air transportation. And in this respect, we can say that Air Canada has played its role admirably.

The corporation was created in 1937, fifty-one years ago, as Trans-Canada Air Lines, and throughout that time, it has provided Canadians with reasonable services at reasonable rates. From the outset, we have had a service that is truly Canadian. In Air Canada's annual report for 1987, we read that it is truly a national carrier. On the first page we read the following:

Air Canada is the largest Canadian air carrier providing scheduled and charter air transportation for passengers and cargo. Air Canada's route network offers scheduled services to 35 North American cities. Through its domestic connector partners, another 66 Canadian communities and 13 cities in the United States are linked to the Air Canada system.

But that is not all. Air Canada is also recognized internationally. Air Canada provides services to many parts of the world, and again, we read in the annual report:

Internationally, the Corporation added new routes, increased services and achieved strong growth within established markets. The inauguration of service to Vienna along with Express Air Canada Cargo's growing international presence, emphasized the airline's expanding global operation.

A little further, it says:

Air Canada is now the preeminent Canadian carrier to much of Europe and the Caribbean countries. The airline also acquired Canadian rights to the Middle East, and much of Asia including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Burma. And, for the first time in its fifty year history, the Corporation will be able to operate transpacific flights to Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Singapore.

Within the next two years, Air Canada will inaugurate service to Nice, France; Madrid, Spain; Lisbon, Portugal; Athens, Greece; and Cairo, Egypt.